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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: POST-ELECTIONS MEETING WITH NATIONAL
SECURITY ADVISOR

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b)
and (d).

1.(C) Summary: Although admitting significant manipulation of the presidential and gubernatorial elections in some states, National Security Advisor Aliyu Mohammed pointed to the electoral tribunals as the appropriate channel for resolution of these problems. Mohammed said Obasanjo clearly won the presidential contest; he dismissed ANPP candidate Muhammadu Buhari's claims of victory. End Summary.

2.(C) Ambassador, accompanied by RAO Chief and CRO, met National Security Advisor General (retired) Aliyu Mohammed April 22 to review the April 19 presidential and gubernatorial elections. Mohammed appeared relaxed and in good spirits. The Ambassador asked for a comparison between this election and the 1983 contest. Mohammed noted that General Buhari overthrew the democratically elected government of Shehu Shagari in 1983, then "did nothing for 18 months" except jail political opponents. Mohammed pointed to the irony of Buhari's current situation; Buhari, the leader of the 1983 coup that toppled Nigeria's last civilian government, was now complaining of democratic malpractices.

3.(C). Mohammed scoffed that Buhari "will make a lot of noise now," but eventually will recede from prominence. In appraising Buhari's bid for the Presidency, Mohammed opined that Buhari made a fundamental error by basing his campaign on religion. This, claimed Mohammed, limited Buhari's appeal, confining his support to a group of northern states.

4.(C) The Ambassador asked the NSA if President Obasanjo will concede Buhari's status as king-maker in the north or if he might have more decisive say in the formation of the new Obasanjo Administration. Mohammed rejected the characterization of Buhari as the preeminent leader in northern Nigeria. That title still belonged to former military Head of State, Ibrahim Babangida. However, he conceded that Buhari is a force to be reckoned with. The NSA predicted that, as was the case after the 1999 elections, Obasanjo will bring into his government select members of the defeated opposition parties. The President will include some members of Buhari's ANPP, but will do this "on his own terms, not Buhari's."

5.(C) Pointing out that the ANPP has rejected the vote results and threatened "mass action," the Ambassador asked if the Presidency expects serious resistance from the main opposition party. Mohammed affirmed the likelihood of resistance in parts of the Northwest where unemployment and religion will fuel agitation. The militant Odua People's Congress (OPC) and other groups of unemployed youth will be the basis for unrest in the Southwest, he predicted. In response to the Ambassador's question on how the Federal Government will respond to such resistance, the NSA vaguely said "we have our ways," but would not amplify any further.

6.(C) The Ambassador noted that international observers saw severe irregularities in several parts of the country on April 19; statements by IRI, NDI and the EU reflect this. As an example, he disclosed that he had photographic evidence of stolen ballot boxes that were dumped in a ravine in Rivers State. Mohammed agreed there were problems in the South-South and Southeast, citing Rivers, Bayelsa and Enugu states specifically. "I question some of these results myself," he admitted. The NSA expressed particular concern over Rivers State, asserting that the Rivers controversy needs to be taken to the electoral tribunal.

7.(C) Reviewing results from the Yoruba-dominated Southwest, Mohammed admitted surprise at the large PDP gains made at the expense of the AD. He agreed with the conclusion that this could be a mortal blow for Afenifere, the Yoruba social-political organization, which the NSA characterized as a gerontocracy that was too tribal-focused and out of touch with the general populace in the Southwest. Bola Tinubu, though a top Yoruba politician, won the only Southwestern state (Lagos) for the AD because he succeeded in appealing to the cosmopolitan mix of voters in West Africa's largest metropolis, concluded Mohammed.

8.(C) Responding to the Ambassador's request for a summary judgment on the elections, Mohammed proclaimed his support for President Obasanjo, "based on the candidates available" and predicted that Buhari would "go to the streets" and attempt to call out the military to take over. In response to the Ambassador's request for any message to Washington on the elections, Mohammed laughed and stated "you should remember Florida in 2001 when Gore was gracious in accepting defeat and in congratulating Bush . . . you should congratulate Obasanjo." Mohammed in turn asked the Ambassador who from the USG should be invited to President Obasanjo's May 29 inauguration, which the Ambassador deflected by noting that this is for the GON to decide.

9.(C) The NSA disclosed that he had written Obasanjo a memorandum the previous day recommending that the President meet with Ambassador Jeter, the UK High Commissioner and the head of the EU Mission to discuss the elections aftermath and the President's plans for his new term. Mohammed hoped that this meeting would take place later in the week. (Note: This meeting has yet to take place. End Note)

WARRI CRISIS

10.(C) Turning to the ongoing crisis in the oil-producing area of Warri in Delta state, Jeter gave Mohammed a letter informing the Federal Government of our intent to provide disaster relief assistance to Ijaw and Itsekiri villagers displaced by the fighting and asking for approval to deliver the aid in the Warri communities. CRO emphasized that the assistance is purely humanitarian -- food, clothing and bedding -- and would be distributed equitably through a U.S. non-governmental organization already operating in the Warri area. The NSA expressed appreciation for the humanitarian initiative (and provided the requested approval in an April 27 letter), but cautioned that such efforts must be seen as non-partisan, helping all affected parties. In resolving the stalemate in the region, the NSA claimed that force would not be used unless necessary, but quickly added that "we cannot allow a gang of thugs to terrorize the area." Mohammed also cited the serious problem of illegal bunkering of oil from the area, a diversion of as much as 10 percent of Nigeria's crude oil production to the black market. Some of this stolen crude is shipped to a refinery in Cote d'Ivoire, where oil is traded for weapons and sent back to the Ijaw militants in the Warri area.

11.(C) The meeting concluded with Mohammed noting that he would be stepping down as National Security Advisor at the time of President Obasanjo's May 29 inauguration but would not offer any hints of possible continued public service in the new Administration.

12.(C) Comment: Mohammed's relationship with Obasanjo has been rocky. Neither trust the other and Obasanjo probably feels that Mohammed always remained more loyal to Babangida than to him. However, in the contest against Buhari, both Obasanjo and Mohammed were fellow travelers. Obasanjo wanted to win; more than Obasanjo winning, Mohammed wanted Buhari to lose. A Buhari loss might just keep Babangida as the strongest star in the northern political environment. Now, with the job done, Mohammed will exit the Obasanjo Administration but this will not be the last we hear from him. However, the next time we see him, we expect that he will be walking close to Babangida.

JETER